

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-08 ISO-00 AEC-05 AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00

CIEP-01 COME-00 DODE-00 EB-04 FPC-01 H-01 INR-05

INT-05 L-01 NSAE-00 NSC-05 OMB-01 PM-03 RSC-01 SAM-01

SCI-02 SP-02 SS-15 STR-01 TRSE-00 FRB-01 FEA-01 PA-01

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4321

INFO CINCPAC

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 6865

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, EMIN, ENRG, AS

SUBJ: WHITLAM LOSES OPPORTUNITY TO LIBERALIZE GOA RESOURCES POLICY

REF: CANBERRA 6751

1. NATIONAL PRESS RECENTLY PREDICTED IMMINENT
CONFRONTATION BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM, THEN
RETURNING FROM NORTH AMERICA, AND MINERALS AND
ENERGY MINISTER CONNOR. ISSUE REPORTEDLY AT STAKE
WAS WHETHER AUSTRALIA SHOULD FACILITATE MORE LIBERAL
INTERNATIONAL ACCESS TO ITS MINERAL RESOURCES, MOST
NOTABLY URANIUM, AND TO THIS END ADOPT MORE DETAILED
POLICY GUIDELINES. THIS CONFRONTATION DID NOT
MATERIALIZE, AT LEAST IN PART BECAUSE LURID PRESS
PREDICTIONS, BASED ON APPARENTLY MISCONSTRUED BACKGROUND
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BRIEFING GIVEN BY FOREIGN AFFAIRS SECRETARY RENOUF,

ENABLED CONNOR TO MARSHALL HIS FORCES BEFORE WHITLAM ARRIVED AT HOME. THE IMMEDIATE RESULTS WERE STRONG STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT FOR CONNOR FROM KEY GOA MINISTERS (CAIRNS, WILLESEE) AND PUBLIC EMBARRASSMENT FOR PUBLIC SERVANT RENOUF, WHO SUBSEQUENTLY APOLOGIZED TO THE MINISTER.

2. RENOUF HAS TOLD ME IN CONFIDENCE THAT VIEWS EXPRESSED IN BRIEFING WERE FAITHFUL REFLECTION OF DISCUSSIONS HE HAD HAD WITH PRIME MINISTER. PRESS FIASCO RESULTED FROM ONE REPORTER'S BREACHING DEEP BACKGROUND NO ATTRIBUTION RULES. RENOUF SAID THAT WHITLAM WAS IMPRESSED ANEW IN HIS WASHINGTON AND U.N. TALKS WITH IMPORTANCE OTHER GOVERNMENTS ATTACH TO GOA'S MINERAL POLICIES AS THEY APPLY TO LONG-TERM OVERSEAS ACCESS TO AUSTRALIAN RESOURCES, FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN RELATED INDUSTRIES AND AUSTRALIAN WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE INTERNATIONALLY ON RESOURCE ISSUES. WHITLAM EXPECTS THESE SAME QUESTIONS TO ARISE DURING VISIT OF PRIME MINISTER TANAKA LATER THIS MONTH AND HIS OWN EUROPEAN TRIP ANTICIPATED FOR DECEMBER, AND HE WANTED TO BE BETTER PREPARED TO DEAL WITH THEM IN A POSITIVE MANNER.

3. EVIDENCE SUGGESTS WHITLAM AND CONNOR POSITIONS HAD GRADUALLY DIVERGED AND THAT GAP DOES IN FACT EXIST. PRIME MINISTER HAS ALWAYS HAD BROADER OUTLOOK TEMPERED BY INTEREST IN WIDER GLOBAL ISSUES AND NOW ESPECIALLY AFTER VISITING WASHINGTON AND NEW YORK, FAVORS A MORE POSITIVE VIEW OF THE OBLIGATIONS OF MAJOR RESOURCE-PRODUCING NATIONS TOWARD CONSUMING NATIONS AND THE WORLD ECONOMY. CONNOR, BY CONTRAST, REMAINS DEDICATED TO A BASICALLY "AUSTRALIA FIRST" POSITION AIMED AT MAXIMIZING THE NATION'S COMMERCIAL ADVANTAGE, DESPITE HIS OCCASIONAL COSMETIC COMMENTS ACKNOWLEDGING NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY. MOREOVER, HE HAS BEEN DILATORY IN SPELLING OUT CRUCIAL DETAILS OF HIS POLICIES.

4. CONNOR ENJOYS INCREASINGLY STRONG POLITICAL SUPPORT WITHIN THE LABOR CABINET AND CAUCUS, AND
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HIS HARD-NOSED RESOURCES POLICIES AND ECONOMIC CHAUVINISM APPEAL TO THE WIDE SPECTRUM OF THE AUSTRALIAN ELECTORATE. IT IS THUS DOUBTFUL THAT WHITLAM, ALREADY BESET BY SERIOUS PROBLEMS WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY, WOULD HAVE CHOSEN TO CHALLENGE CONNOR FRONTALLY ON RESOURCES POLICY.

5. DURING PREVIOUS WEEKS, CONNOR HAD ASTUTELY INDICATED

MORE POLICY FLEXIBILITY, PARTICULARLY ON URANIUM, TO
CREAT IMPRESSION HE WAS MOVING SOMEWHAT FROM HIS
EARLIER, MORE NATIONALISTIC POSITION. IT IS THEREFORE
REGRETTABLE THAT THE OPPORTUNITY FOR WHITLAM TO ENCOURAGE
AND SPEED UP A GRACEFUL POLICY ADJUSTMENT TOWARD INCREASED
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION WITHOUT ANY PUBLIC EMBARRASSMENT
FOR CONNOR HAS BEEN BLIGHTED BY THE FALL-OUT FROM
RENOUF'S UNFORTUNATE BACKGROUNDER. RATHER, BY PUBLICLY
DRAMATIZING THE SITUATION AS A "DISAGREEMENT", IN A
SENSATIONAL AND HIGHLY PERSONAL CONTEXT, THE PRESS
ACCOUNTS HAVE SERVED TO HARDEN CONNOR'S POSITION AND
PROBABLY MADE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR HIM TO CONTINUE ANY
MOTION IN WHITLAM'S DIRECTION.

6. AS A RESULT, ANY IMPRESSIONS WHICH WHITLAM MAY
RECENTLY HAVE GIVEN ABROAD THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WILL
BE ADOPTING A MORE COOPERATIVE STANCE ON INTER-
NATIONAL MINERALS TRADE AND INVESTMENT ARE NOW SUBJECT TO SOME
DOUBT. GIVEN THE MORE DEEPLY ENTRENCHED ECONOMIC NATIONALISM
ON RESOURCES HE NOW FACES IN HIS OWN CABINET, AND THE NEW NEED
TO PROCEED CIRCUMSPECTLY, AT BEST, WITH CONNOR, ANY
LIBERALIZATION PLANS WHICH WHITLAM MAY HAVE HAD WILL
NOW HAVE TO PROCEED MORE SLOWLY THAN HE MIGHT HAVE HOPED.
GREEN

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